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JAPAN: CHANGING VIEWS ON SECURITY TREATY

ANNCR: IN JAPAN, THE LATEST OPINION POLLS SHOW INCREASED PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THAT COUNTRY'S DEFENSE ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE UNITED STATES. THIS TREND COMES AT A TIME WHEN JAPANESE OPPOSITION PARTIES ARE BEGINNING TO MODERATE THEIR CRITICISM OF THE U.S.-JAPANESE MUTUAL SECURITY TREATY. VOA'S JOSEPH SULLIVAN HAS THESE OBSERVATIONS.

VOICE: THE MOST DRAMATIC REVERSAL ON JAPAN'S SECURITY TREATY WITH THE UNITED STATES CAME TO LIGHT LAST MONTH WHEN THE OPPOSITION DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST PARTY REVISED ITS PARTY PROGRAM TO GIVE EXPLICIT SUPPORT TO THE TREATY. THE D-S-P PLATFORM NOW DESCRIBES THE MUTUAL SECURITY TREATY AS "A VITAL FACTOR IN HOLDING THE COMPLICATED POWER BALANCE IN ASIA." IT ALSO CALLS FOR EFFORTS TO MAKE THE TREATY A MORE VIABLE INSTRUMENT IN JAPAN'S SECURITY. HERETOFORE, THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS HAD DEMANDED A PHASED ABROGATION OF THE SECURITY TREATY AND OPPOSED THE STATIONING OF AMERICAN TROOPS IN JAPAN.

AT THE SAME TIME, TWO OTHER JAPANESE PARTIES -- KOMEITO AND THE JAPANESE SOCIALIST PARTY -- HAVE IMPLICITLY TEMPERED THEIR OPPOSITION TO JAPAN'S SECURITY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES. KOMEITO IN LATE 1975 RECINDED ITS DEMANDS FOR THE IMMEDIATE ABROGATION OF THE SECURITY TREATY IN FAVOR OF AN AGREEMENT ON ITS ULTIMATE ABROGATION.

AS FOR THE JAPANESE SOCIALIST PARTY ALTHOUGH IT'S MADE NO CHANGE IN ITS OFFICIAL POSITION ON THE MUTUAL SECURITY TREATY, THREE OF THE PARTY'S DIET MEMBERS HAVE PROPOSED A TIMETABLE THAT WOULD -- SIMILAR TO THE KOMEITO POSITION-- PROVIDE FOR THE

CONTINUATION OF THE TREATY WHILE RETAINING ITS ABROGATION AS AN ULTIMATE GOAL.

POLITICAL OBSERVERS SAY THERE ARE SEVERAL FACTORS BEHIND INCREASED SUPPORT IN JAPAN FOR THE U.S.-JAPANESE SECURITY TREATY. FOR ONE, THE REVERSION OF OKINAWA TO JAPANESE CONTROL HELPED LOWER THE U.S. MILITARY PROFILE IN JAPAN. IN ADDITION, WITH THE END OF THE AMERICAN MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN INDOCHINA, JAPAN WAS NO LONGER DRAWN BY THE MUTUAL SECURITY TREATY INTO SERVING AS A SUPPORT BASE FOR A WAR WHICH THE JAPANESE SO STRONGLY OPPOSED. COMMUNIST SUCCESSES IN INDOCHINA HAVE ALSO FORCED TOKYO TO TAKE A MORE SERIOUS LOOK AT ITS SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS. AND, IF RECENT PUBLIC OPINION POLLS ARE ANY INDICATION, MANY JAPANESE HAVE CONCLUDED THAT THE SECURITY TREATY WITH THE UNITED STATES IS THE MOST REALISTIC ANSWER TO JAPAN'S DEFENSE NEEDS.

IN ANY EVENT, THE NEW POSITION TAKEN BY THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST PARTY SIGNIFICANTLY ALLIES THE D-S-P WITH THE RULING LIBERAL DEMOCRATS ON THE TREATY QUESTION. AND THIS MOVE, ALONG WITH THE SOFTENED POSITION OF KOMEITO, COULD GO A LONG WAY IN RESOLVING THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION PARTIES OVER THE APPROACH TO JAPAN'S SECURITY.